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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 12363

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: LOCAL PRESS ALLEGES AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN ELECTIONS. POSSIBILITY OF THIEU-HUONG WITHDRAWAL

1. SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION: LOCAL PAPERS AUGUST 3 AND 4 CARRY SENSATIONALIZED STORIES ALLEGING US ECONOMIC PRESSURES AGAINST PRESIDENT THIEU ON BEHALF OF VICE PRESIDENT KY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY. STATING THIEU WILL NOT YIELD AND SUGGESTING THE POSSIBILITY OF A WITHDRAWAL OF THE THIEU-HUONG SLATE FROM THE ELECTIONS. THE STORIES MAY REPRESENT A DELIBERATE ADMINISTRATION PLANT TO PARRY MOUNTING CRITICISM OF THIEU FOR HIS SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO BLOCK KY'S CANDIDACY. END SUMMARY

2. STORIES (IN BOTH ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE PRESS) ALONG ABOVE LINES CITING UNNAMED FOREIGN AND VIETNAMESE OBSERVERS AND OFFICIALS IN SAIGON APPEARED AUGUST 4 IN AT LEAST SEVERAL LOCAL PAPERS REPRESENTING A VARIETY OF POLITICAL OPINION INCLUDING THE BUDDHIST OPPOSITION DAILY GIO NAM, NORTHERN CATHOLIC XAY DUNG (SYMPATHETIC TO KY) AND SIGNIFICANTLY IN SEMI-

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REVIEWED BY Joan Zgubecy DATE 1/26/82
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OFFICIAL TIN SONG DAILY WHICH IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH MR. HOANG DUC NHA, THE PRESIDENT'S PRIVATE SECRETARY, AND HAS GIVEN REPORTS: ...ST COVERAGE.

...TIN SONG AUGUST 3 CARRIED BANNER HEADLINES THAT "IF THE US ENCROACHES TOO FAR, THIEU-HUONG WILL WITHDRAW" AND AN ATTACHED STORY REPORTING "MANY SIGNS" (UNSPECIFIED) OF US ECONOMIC PRESSURE ...N PRESIDENT THIEU TO ASSIST KY'S CANDIDACY. THE STORY ALSO CONTRASTED REPORTS OF US INTERVENTION FOR KY WITH EARLIER OFFICIAL ...S STATEMENTS OF NEUTRALITY. ALSO IN AN EDITORIAL ENTITLED "CLINGING TO THE AMERICANS" AUGUST 4, TIN SONG NOTED THE INCONSISTENCY ...TWEEN APPEALS BY KY AND MINH FOR US NON-INTERVENTION AND SUBSE-QUENT ALLEGED REQUESTS FOR US ASSISTANCE TO THEIR CAMPAIGNS. THE EDITORIAL CONTINUEDTHAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER HAS SATISFIED THESE APPEALS FOR HELP AND SURMISED THAT THE US NO LONGER MAINTAINS A POLICY OF NEUTRALITY. TIN SONG CONCLUDED OMINOUSLY: "AN OFFICIAL IN THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO THE ELECTIONS THE PRESIDENT HAS A DUTY TO CONCENTRATE ALL HIS ENERGIES ON THE ANTI-COMMUNIST STRUGGLE DURING THIS SPECIAL PERIOD. ACCORDINGLY, IF FOR ANY RELATED REASON THE NATION COMES CLOSE TO A DANGEROUS SITUATION THE PRESIDENT WILL DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE ELECTIONS."

4. COMMENT: IN LIGHT OF TIN SONG'S SEMI-OFFICIAL STATUS, WE SUSPECT THAT THE STORIES OF AMERICAN PRESSURE MAY REPRESENT A DELIBERATE ADMINISTRATION PLANT IN PART TO REGISTER ITS DISPLEASURE AND ALSO TO DEFLECT SOME OF THE MOUNTING CRITICISM OF THIEU'S HANDLING OF KY'S CANDIDACY. WHILE THIEU'S WITHDRAWAL IS IMPROBABLE IN THE EXTREME, STORES OF AMERICAN INTERVENTION AND THIEU'S REFUSAL TO YIELD TO FOREIGN PRESSURES COULD CONFUSE THE ISSUE AND POSSIBLY IMPROVE THIEU'S NATIONALIST CREDENTIALS. OPPOSITION PRESS PROBABLY INTERESTED IN STORIES AS EVIDENCE OF FRICTION BETWEEN THIEU AND THE US. SUCH REPORTS COULD ASSIST OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BY CHALLENGING POPULAR IMPRESSION (DESPITE OUR DENIALS) THAT THIEU IS AMERICAN FAVORITE AND ACCORDINGLY ASSURED OF REELECTION.
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